INTERVIEW OF JOHANN RUSH

Report typed 11/25/68
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SYNOPSIS:

On 11/24/68, I interviewed Johann Rush, formerly a news photographer for WDSU in New Orleans, concerning film he took of Lee Harvey Oswald's distribution of FPCC literature on 8/16/63, and related matters. Some of the film shot on 8/16/63 was routinely discarded that day, but it is believed that all of the rest was given to the FBI and the SS and is currently available. The stills Rush gave the SS were taken from this film, but we do not know exactly which frames were involved. Rush was never asked by the Federal authorities for an identification of people in his pictures, but he has no new information to provide on the unidentified persons. He spoke with Oswald after the court appearance on 8/12/63 and suggested that Oswald phone WDSU if he gave out literature again.

DETAILS:

Disposition of the film after it was taken: Rush advised that since the 8/16 literature distribution was a routine story, he probably shot about 50 feet (about 80 seconds) of film. A couple of hours later, perhaps after completing other assignments, he took the film to Pan American Films, as usual, for processing. They sent the processed film to WDSU. It was edited to about 30 to 40 seconds for the 5:30 p.m. news show. This editing was not done by Rush, but probably by Edwin Pouchet (phonetic). Rush does not recall what was on the film that was edited out and discarded. The remaining film was shown on the evening show and probably also on the 11 p.m. news, and then filed. Such film is kept for 3 months and thus would ordinarily have been discarded at the end of November.

After the assassination: On 11/22/63, when Oswald was named in connection with the assassination, various WDSU personnel, including Rush, recalled that they had some film of Oswald. It was located and run locally and provided to the network that night. Rush is satisfied that no further editing was done at this point.

On 11/23 or 11/24, Rush received permission from his boss, John Corporan, to take the original film to Pan American Films to get copies made. Rush believes, but is not certain, that this is when the literature distribution film was combined with the shots of Oswald leaving the courtroom on 8/12 and of the interview at WDSU on 8/21. He is confident that no cuts were made at this point. He had 3 positive and 3 negative prints of the entire film made, and still has one of each. He advised that they are unspliced and that one can see where the original was spliced. This film, then, containing all the film of the 8/16 incident that existed at the time of the assassination, is the one that was made available to the network and the various Federal agencies, and is available now. (The SS referred to what they got as a film "clip" (CE 1153), but it was the entire available film.)

Stills: Mr. Rush may have been requested by the FBI or the SS to make stills, but he would have done so on his own initiative anyhow, for possible use by the wire services. He did not recall how many stills he made, or from how many frames. He believed that he made stills only from the 8/16 sequence, except perhaps for one closeup of Oswald. At this point I showed Rush excerpts from CE 1153. He did not recall anything which contradicted this SS report, which says that Rush gave the SS one still on 11/24, and the film plus 17 stills from 3 different scenes on 11/26. He does not recall whether these 17 stills were from 17 different frames. He said he would have made stills from two different frames of the same scene, such as Pizzo Exh. 453 A and B, to show the persons pictured from different angles. He has no copies of the stills in his possession.

Contacts with Federal agencies: Rush recalled that a few days after the assassination, while he was working in the darkroom, he talked with some federal agents who obtained stills and a film from him and took notes. He vaguely recalled that these were FBI agents, but after reviewing CE 1153 and the FBI interview of Mr. Corporan (CD 6, pp. 421-2) we agreed that the original agents were probably SS. (The Corporan report indicates that the FBI obtained the film from Pan American on 12/3.) Rush recalls that the agents he spoke to expressed interest in identifying whoever else was handing out literature with Oswald. He is sure that he was never interviewed by the FBI or the SS for the purpose of identifying the people in his pictures.

Other contact with Oswald: Rush advised that he was present when the studio interview was filmed on 8/21, but that the cameraman was Mike Lola (or Lala). Rush himself had filmed the sequence at Municipal Court on 8/12. After the court session he talked briefly with Bringuier (who told him Oswald was a Communist and showed him the Guidebook for Marines) and also with Oswald. He asked Oswald (not on camera) whether he was going to hand out leaflets again. (Rush said to me that he was not particularly interested in the politics involved, but that a film of Oswald in a fight, as had occured the previous Friday, would be of some news value.) Oswald said that the Committee was to meet to discuss further plans. Rush suggested that Oswald call WDSU if he was to distribute literature again. He feels that Oswald did make such a call on or before the 16th, but he has no specific knowledge of it. He does not recall whether this assignment was given to him when he reported to work on the 16th or later in the day.

Rush's recollection of the 8/16 incident: Rush arrived at the scene around noon, took a couple of minutes to park and prepare his equipment, and shot an opening scene. He recalls that the action had apparently just started, and that the WWL photographer was already there. He may have said hello to Oswald but had no conversation with him or the others distributing literature. (I do not remember asking Rush if he had any other contact with Oswald, but I am sure that he would have mentioned it if he had.) He remained on the scene a half hour or so, leaving after the crowd had thinned.

WWL film: Rush identified the WWL photographer as Mike O'Connor, whom he knew. When asked about Garner Exhibit 1, he immediately identified it as from the WWL film. He noted that this picture was displayed prominently at WWL after the assassination, had been entered in a contest, and had appeared in Life a few weeks after the assassination. (It is noted that on page 38 of Life for 11/29/63, there is a picture of which the Garner Exhibit is a cropped and much less clear version. The credit is "Michael O'Connor for WWL-TV." The street sign is seen to read "Camp," and a sign reading "Hats Cleaned" and "Shoes (illegible)" is visible behind Oswald. This picture, which I am sure was taken on 8/16, also appears in CE 291, which is from a later issue of Life.)

Identity of people on the film: Rush advised that the only persons he could identify when he reviewed his film recently with Bill Turner were Oswald, O'Connor, and one of the secretaries from the ITM. He did not recall the secretary's name, but recognized it when I asked if it was Dolores Neeley. When I showed him the interview of Neeley, he remembered that they had gone into the ITM for a sandwich after he finished shooting. He does not know where Mrs. Neeley is now.

At first Rush did not remember recognizing anyone else on 8/16. When I asked him if there was a still photographer there, he remembered seeing someone with a camera whom he did not notice as a stranger. He felt this was probably someone from the newspaper whom he had seen before. Rush noted that he started working for WDSU in July 1963. (I believe he said he came to N.O. at that time.) Thus, he was not in a position to have recognized many of the people working at the ITM. He would have

recognized Clay Shaw, he said, since he had done a story involving him, and he definitely did not see Shaw at the literature distribution.

In viewing the film with Turner, Rush observed a man who appeared to be a janitor; this is presumably the man identified by James Lawrence as Mr. Bridges, Maintenance Superintendent of the ITM (CD 206, p. 217). He also mentioned that two men in the background looked as if they might have been with Oswald. It is my understanding that these observations are based on recent study of the film and not on independent recollection.

Background: Rush can be reached through 415-626-5268; mailing address is 115 New Montgomery, San Francisco. I interviewed him at the request of Harold Weisberg; we talked at the offices of the S.F. Newsreel, a movement organization. Having checked with Bill Turner that I was okay, he was quite willing to discuss this matter with me. He was friendly and attempted to be precise in his recollections. At his request, no tape recording was made. I have not shown this report to him for corrections, and I have little experience in interviewing people, so I suggest that all but the basic points of this report be checked out with him before any great significance is attributed to them. Incidentally, he offered to make a duplicate of the film for me, but I did not order one.

Relevant Warren Commission material: Rush is named in CE 1153. His film is mentioned in CD 87, SS 200, and some stills are attached. (This is the report dated 11/29/63 which is cited in the later SS report, CE 1153.)

FBI reports: CD 6, pp. 416-7 (Neeley; Rush is named); CD 206, pp. 216-8 (Lawrence; Rush mentioned but not by name); CD 75, p. 687 (Rush indexed to this page, which I have ordered but not seen, along with Steele); CD 6, pp. 421-2 (Corporan). No other reference to Rush found in available indexes.

Several CD's should be checked to see if any stills of the literature distribution are included as attachments or exhibits. These include CD 6, 75, 152, 194, 206. Harold Weisberg has asked the Archives for "any and all interviews with or reports on Johann Rush ... including copies of the photographs and film clips he provided November 26, 1963."

It is noted that FBI Exhibits D-116 and D-117 in the Archives are rolls of 16 mm. film from WDSU and WWL respectively. (31 F.R. 13972)

P. H.
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